United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

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6 May 1991

MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council extends mandate of United Nations Observer Group in Central America for further six months, until 7 November.

- Office of United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator reports at least 125,000 dead in Bangladesh cyclone.

- Secretary-General and Co-Chairmen of Paris Conference on Cambodia welcome acceptance by all parties concerned of cease-fire at least until meeting scheduled for early June in Jakarta with Supreme National Council.

- United Nations Children's Fund Executive Board appeals for international assistance to children affected by Bangladesh cyclone, cholera, Gulf crisis, Chernobyl accident and AIDS, among other things.

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The Security Council today extended the mandate of the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) for another six months, until 7 November.

By its unanimous decision, the Council noted the need to continue to monitor expenditures carefully during the current period of increasing demands on peace-keeping resources.

In a report to the Council dated 29 April, the Secretary-General proposed that the Group be reduced from 187 military observers to a total of 130, and that the Central American countries provide rent-free office space to the Group to cut costs.

The ONUCA has been in the area since March 1989 to verify the Esquipulas II Agreement -- a peace plan agreed upon by the Presidents of the five Central American countries, of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica.

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For information media—not an official record

The death toll in the Bangladesh cyclone catastrophe has reached 125,000, according to a report yesterday by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO). The agency said the official casualty figure was predicted to increase further, because information was still coming in from isolated and inaccessible areas.

The UNDRO said an estimated 2 million survivors were in immediate need of drinking water and dry food. With the passing of each hour, their lives were at stake unless massive measures were taken to at least supply adequate drinking water. The agency said the World Health Organization (WHO) had issued an urgent appeal for $3 million for items needed in the health sector for relief for 650,000 people.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar and the two Co-Chairmen of the Paris Conference on Cambodia -- the Foreign Ministers of France and Indonesia -- have welcomed the voluntary cease-fire accepted by the parties in the conflict.

They said in a statement today that they were gratified that the appeal they made on 22 April for a temporary cessation of hostilities in Cambodia, at least until the meeting they had proposed to hold with the members of the Supreme National Council in Jakarta, was accepted by all parties.

They said they considered the cease-fire a sign of the commitment by the parties concerned to reach a positive result at the Jakarta meeting, scheduled for early June.

They said they had decided to send a team to the area to make an on-the-spot review of the situation. The team, to be led by Major-General Timothy Dibuama, Military Adviser to the Secretary-General, was expected to begin its review by the end of this week.

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The Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), concluding a two-week session last Friday, 3 May, approved programme budget expenditures of some $573 million in general resources and about $800 million in supplementary funding for programme cooperation in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean. The expenditures also cover interregional and other programmes.

Among the resolutions approved on Friday were appeals to the international community to help alleviate the effects of the cyclone in Bangladesh, and a request to the Executive Director to work to reduce the suffering of the women and children affected.

By a text on the fight against cholera, the Board urged that the Executive Director continue using his good offices to obtain funds to reach the emergency request of $2 million for treatment of victims of cholera and

other measures to stop the spread of the disease. The Executive Director was urged, in another resolution, in consultation and cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), to develop a strategy to combat the spread of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Under a text on victims of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, the Board urged the Executive Director to consider possible technical and other special assistance to children and mothers living in the most affected areas.

The Board also called for accelerated programme implementation and emergency responses in Middle East and North African countries and in Djibouti, where child survival, protection and education programmes had been undermined by the effects of the Gulf crisis on families.

By a resolution on Central and Eastern Europe, the Board decided to maintain an amount of $1 million a year to be spent in support of data collection on the situation of children and women in that region.

In a closing statement, Lisbet Palme (Sweden), Chairman of the Executive Board, said insufficient attention had been paid to the environment, adding that "a healthy child cannot survive and develop in an unhealthy environment".

James P. Grant, UNICEF's Executive Director, said the secretariat regarded the Board's reluctance and reservations on the budgetary and staffing proposals as a challenge for the agency to innovate, streamline and to do more with less. He believed that the proposals reflected genuine commitment and prudent budgeting and represented important elements in the quality of UNICEF's capacity for the 1990s.

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General's Executive Delegate for humanitarian assistance to northern Iraq goes on mission to Persian Gulf region to discuss refugee situation and United Nations' take-over of centres.

- United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission completes deployment in demilitarized zone between two countries; coalition forces to begin withdrawal from zone.

- Commission calls for review of implementation of Global Programme of Action and System-wide Plan on Drug Abuse Control.

- Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar will visit Washington, D.C., from 8 to 10 May for meetings with President George Bush and other high-level United States officials.

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A United Nations official in Geneva announced this morning that the Secretary-General's Executive Delegate for humanitarian assistance to Iraq and its borders with Turkey and Iran, Sadruddin Aga Khan, was going on a mission today to the Persian Gulf region at the Secretary-General's request.

The official said that Sadruddin Aga Khan would discuss during his one-week stay in the area the situation of displaced persons and refugees as well as the modalities of the United Nations' take-over of the refugee centres in northern Iraq with relevant national authorities and representatives of the agencies and non-governmental organizations. He would be visiting Kuwait, Iraq, Iran and Turkey, as well as the Iraq-Turkey and Iraq-Iran border areas.

In a separate development today, a United Nations official announced that the Special Commission set up by the Security Council to monitor Iraqi destruction of certain types of weapons had met this morning in order to break down into four working units: chemical and biological weapons:

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nuclear-weapons capability; ballistic missiles; future compliance. He said the Commission would meet for the rest of the week in brief meetings each morning followed by meetings of the four working groups.

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A United Nations official announced today that Major-General Gunther Greindl, Chief Military Observer of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), had informed the Secretary-General yesterday that the force had completed its deployment in the demilitarized zone between the two countries, and was ready to assume its monitoring and observation functions. The General said he was informing the Iraqi and Kuwaiti Governments as well as the coalition forces, so that they could begin the withdrawal of their military forces from the zone.

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The Commission on Narcotic Drugs, currently meeting in Vienna, has approved a draft resolution which would have the Economic and Social Council authorize the Commission to review the implementation of the Global Programme of Action and the development and implementation of the United Nations System-Wide Plan on Drug Abuse Control. The Global Programme was adopted by the special session of the General Assembly on international cooperation against narcotic drugs, held in February 1990.

The text, approved by consensus, would also ask the Secretary-General to take the appropriate administrative steps to ensure that the Commission would be able to assume these additional functions with effect from the dates set for its 1992 session.

The draft text also proposed that the terms of reference of the Commission, adopted in 1946, needed adjustment and expansion in the light of the intensification of international cooperation against illicit production and trafficking.

Also this morning, the Commission discussed a draft resolution on its functioning which proposed that the Commission henceforth should meet annually.

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The Secretary-General will travel to Washington, D.C., tomorrow, 8 May, to begin a three-day round of meetings with President George Bush, Secretary of State James A. Baker III, and various senior Administration officials and Congressional leaders. The meeting with President Bush is scheduled for Thursday, 9 May, in the morning, followed by a working luncheon at the White House.

On Thursday afternoon, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar will meet members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at an informal gathering hosted by Committee Chairman Claiborne Pell (Democrat, Rhode Island). He will also meet with the leadership of the House of Representatives. Before returning to New York on Friday, he is expected to receive senior Administration officials in his suite at Blair House.

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees asks South African Government to clarify its position on amnesty and any other obstacles that prevent repatriation process for refugees and political exiles.

- Secretary-General appoints Ingrid Lehmann Director of United Nations Information Centre in Washington, D.C.

- Food and Agriculture Organization to send mission to assess food and crop damage in Bangladesh.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, has asked the South African Government to clarify its position on amnesty, as well as any other obstacles that prevent UNHCR from beginning a repatriation process for South African refugees and political exiles.

In a statement issued in Geneva today, Mrs. Ogata said she was prepared to send a high-level delegation to South Africa to conclude negotiations once those clarifications are received. She said she feared momentum was being lost in the negotiations and that of all the outstanding issues, the most crucial -- that of amnesty -- remained elusive.

In a communication last Friday, the South African Government said the draft memorandum of understanding still presented major problems. It said clauses regarding the issue of amnesty were unacceptable and would require extensive discussions.

The UNHCR estimates that about 40,000 South Africans scattered around the world will apply for voluntary repatriation.

In a related development, the Special Committee against Apartheid has expressed grave concern that 18 months after adoption of the United Nations Declaration on Apartheid, the South African authorities have failed to establish a climate conducive to negotiations.

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In a statement dated 6 May, the Chairman of the Committee, Ibrahim Gambari of Nigeria, said Pretoria had yet to comply fully with agreements reached with the African National Congress (ANC) last summer. He noted that the 30 April deadline set for the release of political prisoners and the return of exiles had passed, while many prisoners remained in jail and thousands of exiles had not yet been allowed to return to their country. In fact, he said some of the exiles that had been able to return had been subjected to detention and harassment by the security forces.

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Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar has appointed Ingrid Lehmann as Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Washington, D.C. which provides services to the United States.

A national of Germany, Ms. Lehmann was Chief of the Peace and Security Programmes Section in the Department of Public Information (DPI) at United Nations Headquarters before the appointment. She has held various posts in the Organization including District Supervisor for the Windhoek Electoral District in Namibia with the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), and Chief of DPI's Non-Governmental Organizations Section in New York.

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The European Economic Community (EEC) has rejected criticism from Iranian and Turkish authorities to the effect that the international response to the crisis of the Kurdish refugees had been insufficient.

In a press communiqué yesterday, the delegation of the European Commission said the criticism of its efforts was based on partial or mistaken figures relating to aid sent in by donors, especially EEC and its member countries. The Commission said the figures often reflected only aid which had been administered by a specific non-governmental organization, or requested by a particular institution. It was clear, the Commission said, that it had donated more than Iranian and Turkish officials had acknowledged.

The Commission said it was in close contact with the Turkish authorities in an effort to smooth out difficulties which could reduce the efficacy of the aid and to clarify the figures concerning the total EEC effort.

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The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced today that it is sending a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh and setting up a local emergency team to carry out on-site assessment of crop damage and food aid needed. The agency said it was also providing $800,000 for two emergency projects.

The cyclone and tidal wave which struck at mid-point in the harvest period of the winter grain crop caused serious damage, but no complete assessment of the damage has been undertaken.

FAO Director-General Edouard Saouma has appointed the Agency's Representative in Bangladesh, P. Myers, to head the emergency team which will assess the extent of damage to agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries as speedily and completely as possible.

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